



# Congressional Record

**Mr. Bishop (GA)** – Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Lena Baker. Today, her family dedicates her tombstone, 65 years after she was laid to rest at the Mt. Vernon Baptist Church in Cuthbert, Georgia.

She was born June 8, 1900 near Cuthbert, in the small community of Cotton Hill where her family worked as farmers. Ms. Baker worked as a maid, cleaning houses and doing laundry to support her three children. She also was employed by Ernest B. Knight, a local gristmill owner.

On April 29, 1944, Ms. Baker was forced from her home by Ernest Knight and taken to the gristmill, where she was held against her will. According to court testimony, Knight brandished the iron bar that was used to lock the door. Ms. Baker, fearing for her life, attempted to leave and the two “tussled” over a pistol. During the struggle, the gun went off, killing Knight. Ms. Baker testified that she walked immediately to the house of County Coroner, J. A. Cox, and confessed to the accidental death of Ernest Knight.

Her trial convened on August 14, 1944 at the Randolph County Courthouse, which was then presided over by Judge Charles William “Two Gun” Worrill, who kept two pistols on the bench. With an unconcerned lawyer by her side, a jury of twelve Caucasian men – hardly a jury of her peers – found her guilty in a trial and deliberation that, together, lasted less than four hours. Judge Worrill sentenced Ms. Baker to be executed. However, Governor Ellis Arnall granted Ms. Baker a sixty-day reprieve so that the Board of Pardons and Parole could review the case.

In January 1945, the board denied clemency. She then was taken to Reidsville State Prison on February 23, 1945. Ms. Baker’s execution date was rescheduled for March 5, 1945. She is the

only woman to be executed by electrocution in the State of Georgia.

She went to the electric chair calmly and bravely. Her last words were, "What I done, I did in self-defense, or I would have been killed myself. Where I was I could not overcome it. God has forgiven me. I have nothing against anyone."

Ms. Baker is buried in the cemetery at Mt. Vernon Baptist Church in Randolph County, where she once worshiped. In 1998 a group of church members finally marked her grave.

In August 2005, the State Board of Pardons and Paroles posthumously pardoned Ms. Baker, acknowledging that the 1945 decision to deny clemency to Ms. Baker was "a grievous error" and that she could have been charged with the lesser crime of voluntary manslaughter, which would have prevented the sentence of capital punishment.

Mr. Speaker, it is my hope that the dedication of her tombstone today can heal the wounds of the past. May Lena Baker now truly rest in peace.